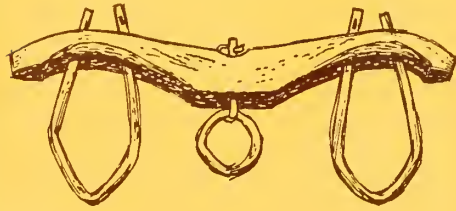


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Herndon's Contribution to Lincoln Mythology

LOUIS A. WARREN

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Herndon's Contribution to Lincoln Mythology

LOUIS A. WARREN

The primary and perhaps the most important task of a painstaking biographer is to test the reliability of his source material. The average historian is often tempted to throw the responsibility for the accuracy of his deductions on other authors who have preceded him in the same field of effort. This is accomplished by the use of a generous distribution of footnotes and references, supplemented with an exhaustive bibliography. Supported by this array of evidences he attempts to give his argument the tone of authority. This method of approach by many Lincoln historians is responsible for the continual repetition of folklore and fable, until numerous, untenable stories, so widely circulated, have become accepted generally as factual, and constitute what we may term, "Lincoln Mythology."

There is no collection of writings, consisting of manuscripts, correspondence, recorded traditions, fragments of folklore, and personal reminiscences, which has contributed more definitely to the current opinion of Abraham Lincoln's private life, than the compilation known as the Herndon collection of Lincoln papers.¹ One would lack the ability of discrimination if he did not acknowledge the historical value of much of the information contained in these documents, but he would also show the absence of nice perception

¹ The originals of the Herndon-Weik Collection are in the Library of Congress. They are divided into five main groups.

- I. Association Pieces
 - A. A sheet from the home-made arithmetic book of Abraham Lincoln
 - B. A small volume of clippings on the slavery question
 - C. Lincoln's "Campaign Book," consisting of miscellaneous clippings, said by William H. Herndon to have been used principally in the Lincoln-Douglas debates
- II. Letters and documents written by or to Lincoln
 - A. Letters and documents in Lincoln's hand or signed by him

if he did not at once recognize a preponderance of data appearing in the memoranda, which both common sense and public records make void.

The mere fact that the Herndon papers were assembled by a law partner of Lincoln was of tremendous importance from the viewpoint of the student searching for reliable data. The supposition that the first book interpreting these manuscripts was written by Ward H. Lamon, one of Lincoln's closest friends, gave additional prestige to the book and its supporting documents, until the famous papers assumed a certain degree of infallibility. So authoritative have they become that even Lincoln's own statements about certain family history and other personal affairs have been pushed aside, when coming in conflict with conclusions drawn from the Herndon sources. With the reliability of both papers and interpreting author apparently established because of such personal and friendly contacts, it is a severe jolt, indeed, to know that the first interpretation of the Herndon papers was not by the friendly Lamon, but a hostile biographer named Chauncey F. Black. He featured the questionable episodes, discovered in the Herndon data, which would place Lincoln in the most unenviable light.²

It has been just a hundred years now since the Lincoln-Herndon partnership was formed. This relationship placed William Herndon in a position to make some positive contribution to a trustworthy recording of facts about his senior partner. It is not strange that in this centennial atmosphere some effort might be made to inquire whether or not Herndon measured up to his great opportunity, or on the other

B. Copies: letters and documents included as by Lincoln

C. Letters to Lincoln

III. Legal documents in Herndon-Weik collection described as "Lincoln Law Cases"

IV. Correspondence, miscellaneous documents, and copy for proposed publication, directly associated with William H. Herndon

V. Correspondence, miscellaneous documents, and copy for proposed publication, directly associated with Jesse W. Weik

² Chauncey F. Black was the ghost-writer for Ward H. Lamon. He was the son of Jeremiah S. Black, cabinet member in the Buchanan administration, and, therefore, Democratic in his prejudice toward Lincoln. See letter by Historicus, in *Harper's Weekly* (62 vols., New York, 1857-1916), LV (July 22, 1911), 6. Also Albert V. House, Jr., "Trials of a Ghost-Writer of Lincoln Biography," *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society* (Springfield, Illinois, 1908-), XXXI (1938), 262-296.

hand, set in motion, by allowing the unwise use of his papers, certain conclusions which have blocked the way to an appreciative understanding of the President.

The task of this inquiry might properly fall upon Indiana critics, because the famous papers were acquired from Herndon by Jesse W. Weik, of Greencastle, Indiana, and for almost a half a century were housed in the state. Three of the five Lincoln works which used the Herndon manuscripts as source material were written in Indiana, or written by Indiana men.

With the trustworthiness of many of the manuscripts in question, and the interpreters who used them making many conflicting deductions from them, it appears that William Henry Herndon, instead of attaining the roll of another Boswell, has become the master Lincoln mythmaker.³

There is no intention to examine the myths he created and elaborate upon them, although some brief references to many of them will appear as the argument proceeds. The objective will be more successfully achieved by directing our attention to various interpretations of the manuscripts. Re-

³ A few of the more current of these myths may be noted.

1. The Paternity Myth, identifying Lincoln as an illegitimate child.
2. The Shiftless Father Myth, portraying his putative father as worthless vagabond.
3. The Maternal Lineage Myth, making his own mother a fatherless waif in childhood and a loose woman at maturity.
4. The Poverty Myth, associating the Lincolns with the poor white trash of the South, and Abraham as a poverty-stricken youth.
5. The Sweetheart Myth, featuring a romance with Ann Rutledge which took place only in Herndon's realm of imagination.
6. The Obscurity Myth, emphasizing his insignificance during the Illinois years, and his meager recognition until 1860.
7. The Matrimony Myth, portraying Lincoln's marrying for self-advancement, and his wife a "she-devil" whose offsprings were "brats."
8. The Failure Myth, setting him up as a proverbial bankrupt, and a lame duck, politically.
9. The Infidelity Myth, misrepresenting his religious background and his theological opinions.
10. The Slavery Myth, denying him any slavery convictions in youth, and making his abolition interests solely political.
11. The Escape Myth, propagating the story of John Wilkes Booth's alleged escape, which fable has now evolved into a mummy or a dummy parade.
12. The Benefactor Myth, accounting for Lincoln's greatness by the guidance and influence of his junior law partner.

ardless of the fact that hundreds of monographs have been influenced by the Herndon papers, on only five different occasions, until their recent deposit in the Library of Congress, have the original documents served as primary sources. The five authors and their respective contributions to be featured are: Herndon's expositions of his own papers in a series of lectures; Lamon's purchase of the documents with Black serving as the interpreter, resulting in a one-volume book; Weik's acquisition of the manuscripts in which he had the collaboration of Herndon and from which came the three-volume edition, also, the one-volume work personally produced by Weik; Beveridge's access to the papers which contributed to the two volumes of his anticipated complete life; and Hertz's publication of many of the originals in a one-volume edition.

The mammoth scrapbook which Jesse W. Weik made while he was collaborating with William Herndon on the famous Lincoln volumes is now the property of the Lincoln National Life Foundation. It provides important information about the reaction of Lincoln's friends and contemporary literary critics to the first three attempts to give the public a glimpse of the famous Herndon documents. These testimonies are of extreme importance in attempting to pass upon the mythical character of the deductions. It is to be regretted some are not dated.

A series of addresses on Abraham Lincoln, which Herndon delivered in 1865 and 1866, was the first intimation which the public in general received that he aspired to write a biography of the martyred President. The fact that Herndon had been Lincoln's law partner, no doubt, encouraged the people to believe that his contributions would be based on personal observations. It was not until November 16, 1866, when he delivered his famous lecture, *Abraham Lincoln, Miss Ann Rutledge, New Salem, Pioneering and the Poem*,⁴ that any recorded unfavorable reaction to his conclusions was forthcoming.

Mrs. C. H. Dall, of Boston, visited Springfield about the time the now famous lecture was delivered. Upon her return

⁴ William H. Herndon, *Abraham Lincoln, Miss Ann Rutledge, New Salem, Pioneering and the Poem, A Lecture Delivered in the Old Sangamon County Court House, November, 1866* (Springfield, Illinois, 1910).

home, she wrote a long letter about an interview she had with Herndon in which she concluded:

We must trust Mr. Herndon, also, because this nation owes him a great debt. It was he who first led Mr. Lincoln to anti-slavery convictions. Bitterly refusing office at the President's hands, he kept the friends moral power to the very last. God grant he may live to complete a work which no one else would ever have the courage to undertake.⁵

Hendron saw this published letter which elaborated on the Rutledge-Lincoln story and also discussed pioneer life in the West, and then wrote in the footnote of a message to Charles H. Hart, with whom he was carrying on a voluminous correspondence, "It is all substantially true and correct."⁶

Herndon, however, was not the only Springfield person to read Mrs. Dall's comment on the interview with him, and her reaction toward men of the West in general. A letter dated Springfield, Illinois, January 25, 1867, and signed "Amgis" was sent to the *Boston Daily Advertiser* commenting on some of Mrs. Dall's conclusions. It said in part:

With no disposition to depreciate Mr. Herndon, or to wound his feelings, respect for my own state, and for the memory of Mr. Lincoln, compels me to say that "Mr. Herndon's lectures are regarded here as caricatures upon the life, habits, and manners of the late President, and there can be no doubt, whatever, that if Mr. Herndon ever completes his biography, it will be characterized by the same rambling, conceited qualities that are so conspicuous in his lectures. Whatever other qualities Mr. Herndon possesses, his is not distinguished for taste, or style in literature; and he is no more a representative of the people of Springfield, or the state of Illinois, than David Crockett was of the people of Tennessee. He seems to imagine that he is the very man above all others to write Lincoln's biography, and that he is to immortalize himself by this effort. Nevertheless, I have never heard one of Mr. Lincoln's friends express other sentiments than those of regret, that he should have undertaken to write the life of one, whose memory is so dear to us all as that of a friend, as it is to the country as that of a statesman and patriot. If you have read the sketches of Mr. Herndon's lectures, you have seen a fair picture of the man. He is 'Bill Herndon' a man 'sui generis', but neither entitled to be a representative of Springfield, or the West, not, a biographer of any other man, than himself. His lectures are Bill-iania, and his book will be Billy-Herndoniana, neither more nor less."⁷

⁵ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 15, 1866. Much of the same material appears in C. H. Dall, "Pioneering," *Atlantic Monthly* (Boston, 1857-), XIX (1867), 403-416.

⁶ Emanuel Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln, From the Letters and Papers of William H. Herndon* (New York, 1938), 54.

⁷ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, January 25, 1867.

This letter clearly implies that at least one person in Herndon's own town was not very favorably impressed with his humility or his literary ability. There were those, however, who lived afar off who were in accord with Mrs. Dall's estimate of Herndon's qualifications to write the biography of Lincoln. The Rochester *Express* on November 24, 1866, mentioned the purpose of Herndon to write a biography and stated editorially, "We observe that William H. Herndon one of the noblest representatives, intellectually and morally, of the America which is to be, has made a public request for all the letters written by Abraham Lincoln."⁸ A month later, the same paper stated:

It is well known that William H. Herndon, the law partner and confidential friend of Mr. Lincoln for nearly a quarter of a century, is slowly and thoughtfully writing the biography of the great President. It is a great history in the hands, destined by Providence to do the work, for in all that goes to make up the highest manhood, the biographer is probably the superior to the subject.⁹

Regardless of what a woman in Boston and a man in Rochester thought of William Herndon's literary ability, there is plenty of evidence that "Amgis," the Springfield correspondent, was more likely to speak with authority from his short range viewpoint. We have every reason to believe, by other statements supporting his comments, that he expressed the general reaction to the lectures of those who knew Herndon best.

The news correspondent, George Alfred Townsend, visited Herndon at Springfield, in January, 1867, two months after the famous address and wrote out the substance of his conversations with Lincoln's famous law partner for the New York *Tribune*. With respect to the death of Ann Rutledge, he claimed Herndon told him this:

About the time when they [Abraham and Ann], passed from courtesy to tenderness, and marriage between them was more than hinted at, the sick man [McNamar] returned like a ghost, gauged the condition of affairs, and upbraided the lady with fickleness. She had a delicate sense of honor, and felt keenly the shame of having seemed to trifle with two gentlemen at once; this preyed upon her mind till her body, not very strong, suffered by sympathy, and Mr. Herndon has oral and written testimony that the girl died out of regret at the

⁸ Rochester, New York, *Express*, November 24, 1866.

⁹ *Ibid.*, December 21, 1866.

equivocal position she had unwittingly assumed. The names of all the parties he has given me, but I do not care to print them.¹⁰

Twenty-three years after Herndon delivered his famous lecture, he wrote to Jesse Weik, "Again, the more I think of the Ann Rutledge story, the more do I think that the girl had two engagements, i. e., that she was engaged to two men at one and the same [time]."¹¹

Some years after Herndon's death, Weik prepared an article about the Rutledge story, for the Indianapolis *Journal*, in which he revealed that much of the source material for the romance came from "Lincoln's most intimate friend, 'Slicky,' otherwise William Green."¹² This is the same "Slicky" Green in whom Herndon said he had no confidence and called him a "hifaluting" exaggerator; yet, apparently Herndon depended largely on Green and John Hill for many details in the Rutledge story, such as Lincoln's graveyard episode.

Weik gives us this interesting observation about Lincoln's alleged mental collapse after the death of Ann Rutledge.

The strain was too great for Lincoln. He wandered away from the place, and many believed him insane. Again his devoted friend, "Slicky" Green, hunted him up. He took the distracted lover to his own home and nursed him back to reason. Green lived at the foot of a hill and near the river, and probably had more influence over Lincoln than any other man then living. Years after Ann Rutledge's death, Lincoln visited Green. They walked together one moonlight night along the river bank. Both were then married and had families. They talked of their younger days, and Lincoln spoke of Ann Rutledge. He clutched Green by the arm and, with tears in his eyes, told him he "hoped the winds of earth might never sigh, nor the snow of heaven be permitted to fall on the grave of the only woman he ever loved."¹³

It is difficult to find a Lincoln student, today, who has given any serious attention to the Rutledge story and all its ramifications, who is not confident the entire love story as it relates to Lincoln is only a piece of fiction from untenable sources, which can be refuted in its entirety by a chronological

¹⁰ New York *Tribune*, January 25, 1867. Also George A. Townsend, *The Real Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1867), 7.

¹¹ Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, 236.

¹² Indianapolis *Journal*. This undated clipping is in the Weik Scrap Book, Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

¹³ *Ibid.* See also Petersburg, Illinois, *The Menard Axis*, February 15, 1862.

record of the people and places associated with the story. It is in reality a re-writing of the John McNamar-Ann Rutledge romance, substituting Lincoln for McNamar and utilizing episodes in Lincoln's romances with Mary Owen and Mary Todd.

Whether or not the unfavorable comments on Herndon's temperamental and literary shortcomings discouraged him in the book project, this fact is certain that he attempted to dispose of his records as early as February 24, 1869, when he asked a correspondent Hart to make some inquiries about their probable value and then concluded, "I may not sell, may finish the life myself, cannot tell."¹⁴ Three months earlier Herndon had tried to induce Hart to secure for him a loan of \$8,000, stating in the letter, "I am worth \$50,000."¹⁵

In the meantime, Herndon had been corresponding with Ward H. Lamon about the records and had submitted some of the documents for Lamon and his "corps of literary friends" to look over. Finally on September 17, 1869, Herndon sold to Lamon his "Lincoln records in three volumes for the consideration of \$4,000 cash in hand paid," empowering him "to sell, publish, use or dispose of said records as he wishes or will."¹⁶

Lamon had interested in the biography project a man of some literary ability, Chauncey Black. Whether it was Black's financial or political urge that prompted him to accept the assignment of interpreting the Herndon manuscripts, we may never know, but it was the biased political stand displayed in his copy that brought suddenly to a close the contemplated two-volume work.

John Spencer Clark wrote to Horace White a letter and enclosures, which were printed in the Massachusetts Historical Society publication. Clark set forth in this correspondence some facts relating to the publishing of the so-called Lamon book. He stated:

Some time in 1870 Col. Ward H. Lamon appeared on the scene as the owner of all the Herndon material, which he had purchased . . . and he stated that this material was to be used and put in literary form by Chauncey Black, a clever writer, and a son of Jeremiah Black, a tough, hard-headed old democrat of the pro-slavery school, and a

¹⁴ Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, 58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

leading, if not the dominating spirit, on constitutional questions in the Buchanan Cabinet.

I raised objection to a life of Mr. Lincoln being prepared under such apparently hostile influences, and Colonel Lamon assured me that nothing politically hostile to Mr. Lincoln should go into the work. . . .¹⁷

The contract for the book was signed, however, and the complete life of Lincoln was anticipated. Clark's prophecy about Black's attitude toward Lincoln was confirmed before very much of the copy was presented, and in one instance a whole chapter was eliminated because of the partisan viewpoint of Black. When Clark discovered that Black was sacrificing Lincoln to uphold the Buchanan administration and learned that Black's political bias was "stronger than his desire to have full justice done to Mr. Lincoln's memory"¹⁸ both Clark and Lamon broke with Black.

It was a tragedy, indeed, that the Herndon manuscripts first fell into the hands of a man hostile to Abraham Lincoln and then were released as having been written by a close friend, Lamon. As Clark well said, the results showed "The futility of endeavoring to combine essentially antagonistic elements in the production of an important literary work."¹⁹ Black had no admiration for the subject of the biography, and he did not go out of his way to test the validity of the mass of folklore and fable before him, with the result, that much of the most untenable gossip on the personal life of Abraham Lincoln, was first laid before the people by a political and sectional antagonist. No one will ever be able to estimate the great injustice done to Lincoln and the members of his family by the hypocritical Black, who posed as a friend and then defamed the man he really despised. His deductions about Lincoln's private life did more than any other work to influence all subsequent Lincoln biographers writing on the subject.

Possibly, the reaction in the South to the Lamon book can be well expressed by presenting the concluding paragraph of a review appearing in the *Southern Magazine* for September, 1872. It states:

¹⁷ John S. Clark, "Lamon's 'Life of Lincoln,'" Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings* (Boston, 1791-), LI (1918), 498-499.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 500.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The author—or compiler—has gathered from all sources, but especially from Mr. Herndon, Mr. Lincoln's intimate associate and business partner, a vast mass of material; and has used it, as he affirms, and as we see no reason to doubt, conscientiously and justly. The whole story of this career (Lincoln's) from beginning to end is so dreary, so wretched, so shabby, such a tissue of pitiful dodging and chicanery, so unrelieved by anything pure, noble, or dignified, that even to follow it as far as we have done, has well-nigh surpassed our powers of endurance; and when, putting all partisan feeling aside, we look back at the men who once were chosen by their countrymen to fill the places that this man has occupied—a Washington, a Jefferson, a Madison, an Adams, or later, a Webster, a Clay, or a Calhoun—men of culture and refinement, of honor, of exalted patriotism, of broad views and wise statesmanship—measure the distance from them to Abraham Lincoln, we sicken with shame and disgust. W.H.B.²⁰

While the *Atlantic Monthly* has not always used discretion in the selection of its Lincoln features, a few excerpts will show the brilliant review it gave the Lamon book in 1872.

We think every one will find Mr. Lamon's "Life of Lincoln" a book of uncommon interest, whatever may be the opinion of its wisdom, its reliability, and its propriety. On all these points we confess to having doubts, and on one at least something more than a doubt. We cannot see what there was in the career or the character of Lincoln that justifies Mr. Lamon in dragging from the dead man's grave the miserable fact of his unhappy marriage, and thrusting it again and again before the reader. It was a point that needed only to be touched with the lightest hand, to which it would have yielded all that was qualifying and significant in it; but this shameless pressure upon it, this record of preliminary occurrences, these hints of the spiritual squalor and the cruel suffering of his marriage, do nothing to explain Lincoln; and they form a violation of the silence of death, and aggression upon the right of those yet living—the widow and the blameless children—to the oblivion which at least temporarily falls upon such facts. This is the chiefly unpardonable feature of a work which has many features hard to forgive, and which treats all Mr. Lincoln's love affairs with a maudlin insistence and a fumbling melodramatic sentimentality very repugnant to taste and trying to patience. . . .

The history of Mr. Lincoln's childhood and early life is exceedingly full and minute. It appears to us at times quite too full to be quite true. There are few things so untrustworthy as the memory of a great man's boyhood friends and old neighbors concerning his life among them. The passion for distinction at his expense through indiscriminate praise or gross derogation, is one that few of them can resist; and even when their recollections are confronted and compared, it must be well-nigh impossible to sift the truth from them, to gather the grains of wheat from the bushels of chaff. However, this only tells against

²⁰ *Southern Magazine* (17 vols., Baltimore, Maryland, 1868-1875), IV (1872), 368.

Mr. Lamon's book in greater degree than it tells against other biographies trusting to similar material, and it must be owned that the use of it is by no means unguarded

Rarely in the whole course of literature have all the disguises of privacy been so stripped from any human character. It is as if it stood naked before the world.²¹

Since we have observed the reaction of Herndon's neighbors in Springfield to the series of Lincoln lectures he delivered there, possibly it might be of value to throw some further light on Herndon's indirect contribution to mythology in the Lamon volume, as viewed by a former acquaintance of both Lincoln and his law partner. A. L. Bledsoe, the editor of the *Southern Review*, was a man of recognized literary ability who lived in the Lincoln neighborhood in Illinois for many years during Lincoln's residence there and was well acquainted with Lincoln at the time. Bledsoe was no lover of Lincoln, but he did state that Lincoln was one of the most extraordinary human beings that has figured in history. He claimed that it was Lamon's book that revealed to him for the first time Lincoln's ruling passion, something that he had never before been able to discover until he read these lines: "It must by this time be clear to the reader that Mr. Lincoln was never agitated by any passion more intense than his wonderful thirst for distinction."²² This passion, according to Black, is the very key to the whole mystery of Lincoln's advancement.

If Herndon had this impression of his partner he must have discounted Lincoln's speech made in Springfield at the close of the senatorial campaign in 1858, when he said: "Ambition has been ascribed to me. God knows how sincerely I prayed from the first that this field of ambition might not be opened."²³ He then admitted that he claimed "no insensibility" to political honors but qualified his personal ambition by this remarkable affirmation:

Today could the Missouri restriction be restored, and the whole slavery question be replaced on the old ground of "toleration," by

²¹ "Recent Literature," *Atlantic Monthly*, XXX (1872), 364, 369.

²² Albert T. Bledsoe, book review of *The Life of Abraham Lincoln; From His Birth to His Inauguration as President*, by Ward H. Lamon, in the *Southern Review* (26 vols., Baltimore, Maryland, 1867-1879), XII (1873), 349. Also Ward H. Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln; From His Birth to His Inauguration as President* (Boston, 1872).

²³ Paul M. Angle (comp.), *New Letters and Papers of Lincoln* (Boston, 1930), 198.

necessity, where it exists, with unyielding hostility to the spread of it, on principle, I would, in consideration, gladly agree, that Judge Douglas should never be *out*, and I never *in*, an office, so long as we both or either, live.²⁴

Of course, there are those today who would easily brush this statement aside by calling it a piece of political oratory, although in the minds of some people, Lincoln's integrity is still a basic element in his character.

Inasmuch as Bledsoe's comments on the Lamon version of the Herndon manuscripts became the primary source of Lincoln mythology in the South, it is important that further consideration be given to his conclusions. Bledsoe commented:

It is believed, by the world at large, that the hatred of oppression, coupled with the love of freedom, was Mr. Lincoln's ruling passion. Nothing is farther from the truth. Some of his biographers, indeed, such as Bacon and Holland, would have us to believe that Mr. Lincoln inherited this ruling passion from his father, Tom Lincoln, who, it is said, left Kentucky on account of his hatred of the institution of slavery. Colonel Lamon has forever dispelled this illusion. "It has pleased some of Mr. Lincoln's biographers," says he, "to represent this removal of his father (from Kentucky to Indiana) as a flight from the taint of slavery. Nothing (he continues) could be further from the truth. . . ."

Tom Lincoln, as Colonel Lamon shows, fled from justice and not from slavery. For having, in a low brawl with one Onlow, a mean blackguard like himself, bit off his nose and left his face disfigured for life, he found it convenient to escape from Hardin county and hide himself in the wilds of Indiana. There young Abe, about four years old at the time of the hegira or flight, was raised, in a little cabin fourteen feet square, made of rough, unhewn logs or poles, and daubed with mud.

This hole was, literally, "a cage of unclean birds." For Tom *Linkhorn*, as he was then called, and Nancy Hanks, the father and mother of our hero, were never married, but just lived together, and cohabited, like the lower sort of negroes of the State from which they had fled. When we heard the late Governor Morehead, of Kentucky, state this fact, as well known to *Tom Linkhorn's* neighbors in Hardin county, we set it down as one of the thousand and one rumors which political prejudice and passion had forged. But it is proved and substantiated by Colonel Lamon in his biography of Lincoln. There the two "mean whites" lived, like the lowest of negroes, in their hut, without door or window, and with no other floor than the naked earth. . . . He never had the least respect for father or mother—for Tom *Linkhorn* or Nancy Hanks. On the contrary, he always abhorred his own father, the brute Tom *Linkhorn*, and had no tender feeling for his mother, Nancy Hanks. It is no wonder, then, that he should have become, as he did, a deter-

²⁴ *Ibid.*

mined and bitter infidel all the rest of his days. Indeed, if he had been required to say the Lord's Prayer, its very first word, "Our *Father*," must have made him *shudder*. "When he went to Church at all," says his biographer, "he went to mock, and came away to mimic." This became the confirmed habit of his soul and conduct.²⁵

Bledsoe's comment on Abraham Lincoln's stepmother is of interest. He said:

But, like a good woman, she . . . devoted herself to the cultivation of the rising genius of young Abe. She came too late, however, to modify his habits or to correct his mocking and sneering infidelity, which continued with him to the day of his death. He always called her mother, and loved her as one; but the blood of Nancy Hanks ran in his veins, and the brutality of Thomas *Linkhorn* showed itself in his actions.²⁶

Just what Bledsoe thought of Herndon, whom he knew very well in the Illinois days, and depended upon indirectly for the above information about Lincoln's parents, is quite important in considering the eligibility of Lincoln's law partner to qualify as his biographer.

The little men about him [Lincoln]—the Herndons of Illinois—thought they understood him, because they were always at his elbow; and forthwith, as soon as he was dead, set up as great oracles to let all the world know what manner of man Abraham Lincoln was It is an old saying, and true as it is old, that "no man is a hero to his valet"; but, as Hegel has well said, "it is the fault of the valet." It was the fault of Mr. Herndon, that he had no soul, no mind, no eye for the really remarkable qualities of Mr. Lincoln. Hence, valet though he was, he thinks himself a much greater man than his hero. "Lincoln," says he, "was a natural anti-slavery man, *as I think*, and *yet he needed watching*." So, in other places, he represents himself as keeping Mr. Lincoln, as watching and training him, and preparing him for "his great career," when the time should arrive to put him on the race-track of glory, allowing him to enter neither too soon nor too late to win, but just in the nick of time. The world is thus given to understand that it owes Abraham Lincoln to William H. Herndon (no very great obligation, perhaps,) his quondam law-partner. We wonder how Colonel Lamon, whose *Life of Lincoln* contains many similar statements, reconciled them with a decent regard for the character of his hero.

Again, says Mr. Herndon, Lincoln "needed hope, faith, energy, and *I think I warmed him*. Lincoln and I were just the opposites of one another. He was cautious and practical; I spontaneous, ideal, and speculative. He arrived at truths by reflection, I by intuition; he by reason, I by my soul. He calculated; I went to toil asking no ques-

²⁵ Bledsoe, book review of *The Life of Abraham Lincoln . . .*, in the *Southern Review*, XII, 340-342.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 344.

tions, never doubting. Lincoln had great faith in my intuitions, and I had great faith in his reason." Only he "needed watching." Thus, according to Mr. Herndon, Lincoln was the cold, creeping, calculating reasoner; while he was the warm, spontaneous, glowing, and gifted seer²⁷

It is quite apparent that those who knew William Herndon, personally, placed little confidence in his ability to speak with any degree of authority on the more intimate characteristics of Abraham Lincoln. This would largely discredit the personal estimates which he made available to Lamon and which were so exaggerated by Black.

Anyone who has read the rambling letters of William Herndon and the equally disorganized arrangement of the subject matter in his early lectures will immediately come to the conclusion that the critics who doubted Herndon's ability to write a biography of Lincoln were correct. Since he first announced his biographical intentions to the public in 1865, a dozen years had passed when he received a letter from an eighteen-year-old boy named Jesse Weik, who was a student in John Clark Ridpath's history class at DePauw University in Indiana. Although interested in Lincoln, it cannot be said Weik was familiar with Lincoln's writings and public speeches, as there was not available to him at such an early date any extensive compilation of Lincoln's works. The fact that he began collaborating with Herndon on the contemplated book when he was little more than a youth without any former literary experience is another factor that must be considered when placing a valuation on the Herndon volumes.²⁸ as it is a well-established fact that Weik, and not Herndon, was the writer of the text. Much of the book was written by Weik in a room above a grocery store in Greencastle, Indiana, and the larger part of his source material came in long letters from Herndon, who stated twenty-three years after Abraham Lincoln was dead, "I have in my memory a thousand unwritten facts about our good man, Abe, that were told me by good and truthful people."²⁹ Herndon wrote down for Weik many of these stories which had slumbered in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 328-329.

²⁸ William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln, The True Story of a Great Life, Etiam in minimis. The History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (3 vols., Chicago, 1889).

²⁹ Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, 228.

his memory for nearly a quarter of a century, and they formed the bulk of the Herndon source material and the nucleus for some of the myths which we now have to combat.

When the book was nearly ready for distribution the *New York Sun* came out with this statement:

We learn from the *Springfield News* that Mr. William H. Herndon, the friend and law partner of Mr. Lincoln is about to publish another and very peculiar book respecting that illustrious man. . . . It is hard, indeed, to imagine the Martyr President exhibited with less draperies than he was on Mr. Lamon's pedestal, but Mr. Herndon thinks it can be done and that his sacred duty is to do it.³⁰

The reaction to the book can be summed up in a general way by saying that political-minded editors adverse to Lincoln, Lincoln's early political rivals, and those ambitious to defame Lincoln, approved of the publication. Most of Lincoln's legal and political associates, his friends and especially members of the Lincoln family were dumbfounded at Herndon's conclusions.

On September 16, 1889, the *Illinois State Journal*, at Springfield, referred to a certain statement about the Herndon book "appearing in such a conservative paper as the *Chicago Evening Journal*," and then proceeded to copy the item in full. The opening statement in the article indicates its critical approach. Referring to the Herndon biography, it states:

It is an infamous book. It is one of the most infamous books ever written and printed in the garb of a historical work relating to a great man. It vilely distorts the image of an ideal statesman, patriot and martyr. It clothes him in vulgarity and grossness. Its indecencies are spread like a curtain to hide the colossal proportions and the splendid purity of his character

The concluding sentence summarizes the Herndon contribution in these words:

In all its parts and aspects, if we are a judge and we think we are, of the proprieties of literature and of human life, we declare that the book is so bad it could hardly be worse.³¹

Almost as vindictive as the *Chicago Evening Journal* item was a comment in the *St. Paul News*. It stated:

³⁰ *New York Sun*. This undated clipping is in the Weik Scrap Book, Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³¹ Springfield, *Illinois State Journal*, September 16, 1889.

Mr. Herndon has one trait that is ever obnoxious in the writers of books—personal vanity, and he lacks another that always challenges the admiration and respect of those who read books, common sense. . . . The “holier-than-thou” air of the writer is repulsive to the last degree, and a shudder creeps over the reader to realize that a “friend” is thus harshly revealing glimpses of a life that came to his knowledge, as the friend and law partner of twenty years, and coolly makes merchandise of the distorted tale

The hideous conceit of this avaricious biographer can bring no harm to the great Emancipator. It is only the author that will suffer and the generation who knew and loved the greatest son of the republic, and those that follow, will condemn the viper that has warmed upon his hearthstone.³²

The St. Louis *Republic*, however, commented, “He (Herndon) is an authority on Lincoln. He will rank as the highest, and the work of all biographers will be corrected by his.”³³

Another review which deals in motives may be noted.

Herndon has unveiled the confidence which came to him in the dual relationship of a friend and partner and there is a suspicion that this has not been done so much to show the weaknesses of Lincoln as to demonstrate the closeness of his own relation to Lincoln. Throughout, there is this strong and unpalatable flavor of “Herndonism” if it may be so called. He draws aside the veil covering Lincoln’s domestic life and love making of his callow days, with the eagerness of a vandal seeking to destroy the temple which he professes to be erecting.³⁴

Getting a little closer to Lincoln’s old haunts we find this observation in the Decatur *Republican*.

Billy Herndon is now an old man, probably not altogether responsible for his acts, and when his life and habits are taken into consideration, it is hardly to be wondered at that he should give to the world a salacious bit of reading, such as he and creatures of his class most delight in He will be remembered only as the one time law partner of his more famous associate who wrote a filthy book about a great subject, in order to direct attention from his life-long failure to make even a faint mark on the page of history.³⁵

In considering the comments on the Herndon lectures and the Lamon book, we have had occasion to review some of

³² St. Paul, Minnesota, *News*, 1889. The clipping is in the Weik Scrap Book, Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³³ St. Louis, Missouri, *Republic*, 1889. The clipping is in the Weik Scrap Book, Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³⁴ *Press*, July 27, 1888. The clipping is in the Weik Scrap Book, Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³⁵ Decatur, Illinois, *Republican*, September 15, 1889.

the reactions of Springfield people to those two interpretations of Herndon's source material. Now what did Springfield think about this third publishing venture? It is not likely that there lived in Springfield at the time the Herndon-Weik volumes appeared, a more prominent figure than John Milton Hay. On January 26, 1892, he wrote a letter to Honorable Thomas Vennum from which the following excerpts are made:

Your letter of the 24th, inst. in regard to that queer production "Herndon's Life of Lincoln" came duly to hand and but for a spell of the grip would have answered sooner.

Herndon was a peculiar kind of "crank" and his work is regarded here as deserving of but little credit by those who were acquainted with both Lincoln and Herndon. Although professing to have been gotten up with friendly intentions towards Lincoln, such professed good intentions are not credited. Herndon had a sort of loose connection with Lincoln as a partner in local business of this county, and after Lincoln's election, as the understanding is here, he went to Washington as an applicant for some place and was disappointed—He returned home soured and sore headed and thereafter active with the Democrats.

Immediately upon Lincoln's death, he proclaimed himself as the only living man who knew all about Lincoln, and assumed that he had been Lincoln's conscience keeper, and that he was the man who had made him what he was, and particularly that Lincoln had confided to him, secrets known to nobody else.

It is not believed that any such confidence had existed—Much of the narrative contained in the Book is known to be erroneous here, and he states the matter as though he was personally acquainted with the facts, it has impaired credence in whatever he has stated as being only within his own knowledge.

The story of Lincoln having told Herndon that his Mother was a bastard is wholly discredited by everybody who knew Lincoln, as well as much of other matter in the Book alleged to have been derived from conversations with Lincoln.

I think I have fairly given the criticism made here by those best acquainted with both Lincoln and Herndon.

I was much gratified to hear from you and I have a pleasant recollection of our old acquaintance.

Your truly,
M. Hay (signed)³⁶

The fact that "everybody" in Springfield who knew Lincoln discredited the buggy ride story during which Herndon claimed Lincoln said his mother was an illegitimate, is inter-

³⁶ Copy of the Hay letter is in the Fish Correspondence file, Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

esting, indeed, in the light of the positive position taken now by nearly every biographer writing about the Hanks family.

An observation with respect to Herndon's youth may help to answer the question why Lincoln happened to become associated with Herndon as a law partner one hundred years ago. Harvey L. Ross, an early roommate of Herndon's, prepared for the Lewiston, Illinois, *Democrat*, in 1896, a series of reminiscences which ran through seventeen issues. He stated:

There are but few persons now living who knew Mr. Herndon as well as I did in the days of his youth. He was a son of Archer G. Herndon, one of the early settlers of Springfield, who built and kept one of the first hotels ever erected in that city—the Herndon House. Archer G. Herndon was a prominent politician and had been elected state senator besides holding several other offices at different times. He was a Whig and a warm personal friend of Mr. Lincoln. . . . While I was carrying the mail I stopped two nights each week at the Herndon House and there is where I became acquainted with William Herndon. We were about the same age he being fourteen years old while I was fifteen.

Ross stated that William Herndon was

about 24 years old when he went in with Mr. Lincoln who was nine years his senior. It was thought a little strange at that time that Mr. Lincoln would take into partnership so young and inexperienced a lawyer as Bill Herndon. But he had his reasons and I think I can come very near guessing some of them. Bill's father had been a friend to Lincoln for a great many years and was a very influential man in Sangamon County. He had always helped Lincoln in every way and it was in payment for this kindness that Lincoln took his son in his office.³⁷

It is well known that the Herndon-Weik book met with such disfavor that it was finally agreed to leave out some of the most objectional stories in the subsequent two-volume edition.

The letters Herndon had written to Weik at Greencastle which had been the most fruitful source of the Herndon-Weik publication, and the Herndon papers acquired by Lamon, which later were purchased by the Huntington Library, at San Marino, California, were allowed to rest undisturbed for nearly forty years, when Weik worked over his material again.

³⁷ Lewiston, Illinois, *Democrat*, 1896. The clipping is in the Weik Scrap Book, Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

He brought out a book called *The Real Lincoln*, with the preface signed at Greencastle, Indiana, on August 10, 1921.³⁸

This new interpretation of the Herndon correspondence and other papers including some original researches by Weik, himself, gave particular emphasis to many of the old Herndon myths which were again revived and nourished. There was no attempt made to write a biography, but the text consisted mainly of reminiscences and extended accounts of the debatable episodes in the three-volume work. Brought to light again, however, the Herndon papers in both the Huntington Library and at Greencastle, Indiana, were to become the center of historical discussion.

In the early twenties when Albert J. Beveridge, author of the famous work on John Marshall, decided to make an epochal study of Lincoln, the Herndon papers received attention for the first time from a nationally known biographer. In the preface of his book Beveridge makes the statement that from Weik came "The largest and most important aid."³⁹ Possibly Beveridge might have had access to the Lincoln papers now impounded in the Library of Congress if Robert Lincoln had not learned that he was placing much stress on the Herndon manuscripts, which Robert had a just reason to deplore. There can be no question that the Herndon traditions greatly influenced the Beveridge volumes, and some of the myths which had fallen into disrepute were given a new lease of life by the conclusions of the distinguished author.

It is surprising how the Herndon papers took on a new importance under the professional handling of a noted historian. The plan Beveridge had in mind, which he very clearly and definitely explained to the present writer then living in Kentucky, called for an evolutionary process of bringing his Lincoln to a great climax. His plan was not so different from Herndon's idea of starting Lincoln in a "stagnant putrid pool," and it was in this same pool where Beveridge, as he worked over the Herndon papers, found the future emancipator. It is to be regretted that Beveridge did not live long enough to get Lincoln entirely out of the

³⁸ Jesse W. Weik, *The Real Lincoln* (Boston, 1922).

³⁹ Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858* (2 vols., Boston, 1928), I, vii.

pool, as he intended to do in contemplated volumes that were never finished.

Beveridge's contributions as a whole were widely acclaimed, although more emphasis was placed on the value of the chapters developing the professional and political years of Lincoln, than those treating his childhood and youth.

Excerpts from some of the most important reviews which deal with the mythical data are of interest in this discussion. Rupert Hughes in the *Chicago Tribune* expressed the opinion that Beveridge "deals ruthlessly with popular myths," yet he finds

that Lincoln's love affair with Ann Rutledge was carried on while she was really engaged to another man; that he did not acquit a client by the use of the wrong almanac; that he was not greatly excited over slavery till well on in life; that he appeared as attorney for a slave holder trying to drag a chattel back across the border; that he was a machine politician who was more ambitious than conscientious; that he used anonymous letters lavishly in his campaigns and when challenged to a duel by a man he defamed, thus, not only broke the law by accepting the challenge, but violated all codes by insisting on a weapon that left his brave and honorable opponent at a fatal disadvantage.

Beveridge shows that none of Lincoln's family voted for or sided with him, and that he did not like his own father. He is pictured as slipshod and slovenly and shiftless, yet shifty in principles to such an appalling degree that some of his debts are still unpaid. There was so much dirt in one corner of his office that weeds grew up in it. He presents Mrs. Lincoln as a half mad savage, a she wolf and a miser.⁴⁰

Allan Nevins also commented in the *Bookman*.

The Book accomplishes two great objects. It proves that, overwhelming as is the literature upon Lincoln, research can still find new facts, some of them of primary importance. It demonstrates also that when candidly exhibited, the facts new and old demolish the Lincoln legend as many have suspected it could be demolished. . . . In these 1300 pages, heavy with footnotes, we have the final verdict upon such moot questions as the character of Nancy Hanks ("uncommonly intelligent, inordinately kind and affectionate"), Lincoln's courtship of Ann Rutledge (a singularly cool affair on both sides), his supposed attacks of "insanity" (merely deep melancholia springing from extreme sensitiveness or tender-mindedness), the character of Mary Todd Lincoln (Mr. Beveridge endorses Herndon's term "wild-cat").⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 1928.

⁴¹ Allan Nevins, book review of *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, by Albert J. Beveridge, in the *Bookman* (76 vols., New York, 1895-1933), LXVIII, 485-487.

Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer in the *Saturday Review of Literature* comments:

In the Herndon store there remained matter which the collectors had not had the skill, or inclination, to use in their own writings and Senator Beveridge thought it worthy of his examination, though much of it emanated from men and women of the most ignorant classes, who really possessed little, and often only pretended to, knowledge of the man of whom they spoke. Is it not rather like "blurb," when this material is called "the most valuable Lincolniana in existence?"

We learn, for example, that Lincoln's mother was a natural child of unknown paternity; that he had many relations born out of wedlock (one of Beveridge's sources names six in one family); that his father was an old loafer, unbelievably worthless; that the family lived in poverty and squalor unheard of in the annals of all the men who ever gave us accounts of themselves in the Congressional Directory; that the boy's associates were ruffians and vagabonds⁴²

W. E. Barton, in the *Christian Science Monitor* admits that

Senator Beveridge has made effective use of the papers which Mr. Weik placed unreservedly at his disposal. The reviewer anticipates that a majority of critics will say that this is Beveridge's most important contribution to his theme; some of the advance notices of the editors or publishers appear to imply this. That could hardly be possible. Beveridge has devoured the Herndon manuscripts down to the very stubble; in places it might have been as well had he not bitten so close to the turf. That he should have added important data to our knowledge of the first 22 years of Lincoln's life was next to impossible. But he has done remarkably well.⁴³

It took no less a historical celebrity than the biographer of John Marshall to endorse the stamp of authenticity on the Herndon papers. Since this blanket approval, the documents, so despised and rejected by Lincoln's own friends and contemporaries, have now attained a respectability and importance second only to the official Lincoln papers now housed in the Library of Congress.

The last person to use the Herndon papers was Emanuel Hertz, and his compilation of documents known as *The Hidden Lincoln* now is available to all who may wish to have copies of the many letters that passed between Herndon

⁴² Ellis P. Oberholtzer, book review of *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, by Albert J. Beveridge, in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (New York, 1924-), V (1928-1929), 268.

⁴³ William E. Barton, book review of *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, by Albert J. Beveridge, in Boston, *Christian Science Monitor*, September 26, 1928.

and his correspondents. There seems to have been some very direct collaboration between the men who used the Herndon papers, Lamon with Herndon, Herndon with Weik, Weik with Beveridge, and Beveridge with Hertz. The latter prepared a monograph on the Herndon papers.⁴⁴ In this pamphlet there is an interesting paragraph on page four, which, from the context, would appear to be the original composition of Hertz, but in reality it was copied from the *New York World* in its announcement of Herndon's death in Springfield in 1891. This is the lifted paragraph which was the conclusion of a tribute to Herndon's industry in gathering data about Lincoln.

To those who have followed the several Herndon narratives it is plain that Mr. Herndon was not, in his relations to Mr. Lincoln, the subordinate character he leaves us to suppose he was. He contributed decidedly to form the mind of Lincoln and to mold his career. But for Herndon, the Lincoln of 1860-65 would not have emerged from the dingy little law office at Springfield, precisely what he was, nor would his history up to that period ever have been precisely told.⁴⁵

The fact that Hertz used this paragraph as his own implies, at least, that he endorsed it.

The compilation of Lincoln's writings, published by Hertz in *The Hidden Lincoln*, has allowed us to make an accurate check on just what Herndon did have to say about Lincoln, and it also allows us to observe something of the development of his Lincoln mythology. Herndon had been gathering information about Lincoln but three years, as he stated when he wrote to Ward H. Lamon on February 26, 1869, that his records about Lincoln were "the most perfect on record."⁴⁶ He did make one probable exception to this statement—Boswell's records of Johnson.⁴⁷ Fame must have seemed to Herndon an easy taskmaster if in three years the collecting of a few manuscripts, while still attending to his law practice, had allowed him to stand by the side of the immortal Boswell. Herndon told Lamon that only by the use of his records could the true life of Lincoln be written, and then concluded that there was fame and fortune in the records when put in the form of a biography.

⁴⁴ Emanuel Hertz, *The Herndon-Weik Collection of Original Lincoln Manuscripts, Documents, and Other Papers* (New York, 1934).

⁴⁵ *New York World*, March 23, 1891.

⁴⁶ Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, 57.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

Ten years elapsed between the sale of the manuscripts to Lamon and Herndon's second attempt to accumulate information about Lincoln. During this interval only one letter written by Herndon appears in the Hertz volume. When this second installment of information began to accumulate Herndon was seventy years of age and Lincoln had been dead twenty years. On December 1, 1888, Herndon advised Weik that he had in his memory a thousand unwritten facts about Lincoln,⁴⁸ and he drew upon this inexhaustible mass of reminiscences and jotted down what he called factual evidences.

It was a changed Lincoln, as might be expected after so long an interval, that emerged from his memory. In his early discussions, he said that Lincoln was "true to friends, never deserting them till they deserted virtue, veracity, and integrity,"⁴⁹ but in his later deductions, Lincoln becomes "a remorseless trimmer with men. They were his tools and when they were used up, he threw them aside as old iron and took up new tools."⁵⁰ In the old installment of notes, Herndon said he "never knew him [Lincoln] to do a mean thing,"⁵¹ but he wrote to Weik in 1886 that "when he [Lincoln] used a man and sucked all the uses [*sic*] out of him, he would throw away the *thing* as an old orange peeling."⁵²

But why continue with these contrasts, which are innumerable, between Herndon's Lincoln of 1869, and his Lincoln of 1889. Such a procedure would cause one to challenge, without good authority, almost all of the accepted, noble characteristics of our best-loved American.

It will be worthwhile, however, to observe briefly, just how much of the source material in the Herndon manuscripts now published in *The Hidden Lincoln* would be accepted today as authentic by any well-trained, discerning historian. *The Hidden Lincoln* is in two parts with a lengthy introduction. Part one is "Letters from Herndon." Part two, entitled "Evidences," has three divisions, "Letters to Herndon," "Statements collected by Herndon," and "Herndon's Notes and Monographs."

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 135.

Only fifty-five of the 233 pages of "Letters to Herndon" were written before 1874, the bulk of the remainder between 1885 and 1891, twenty years and more after Lincoln was dead. Only twenty-eight of the above-mentioned fifty-five pages of letters were written within three years after Lincoln's death, and even in these few pages many of the incidents discussed occurred in Kentucky sixty years before they were recorded.

Most of the correspondence in "Letters to Herndon," written shortly after Lincoln's death, covering seventy-three pages, was from people who were reciting incidents which happened in Indiana, at least thirty-five years before, or in New Salem, twenty-eight years before Lincoln was assassinated. The forty-eight pages of "Statements Collected," on his trip to Indiana, and a few others in Illinois were also in most instances memories of people who were trying to recall events which happened a quarter of a century before. "Herndon's Notes and Monographs," which cover forty-nine pages, were apparently written as late as 1887, twenty-two years after Lincoln was dead.

No summary of the contents of the volume is needed to reveal the general character of the evidence therein displayed. It is not strange that the trend of Lincoln biography emerging from such an unreliable original source is still presenting a confused mass of contradictions. When one observes such hostile interpreters as Black and Bledsoe, utilizing directly or indirectly these sources on the very threshold of the Lincoln literary structure, now enlarged to such enormous proportions, he is not surprised at the mythical content of our current Lincolniana.

The good and noble acts of Abraham Lincoln may be authenticated by a voluminous mass of his own personal writings and addresses—greater in bulk than the complete works of Shakespeare. Supplementing this dependable information there is available the reports of hundreds of interviews and observations relating to Abraham Lincoln which were written down while he lived. It is almost unbelievable that a mass of folklore and tradition of such unreliable content as the Herndon papers should become our primary source bearing on the private life of America's outstanding historical character.

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